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ABSTRACT

Current public demands for increased educational quality can best be met at the state education agency (SEA) level, but the SEA is faced with the fact that no single, clearly acceptable definition of educational quality exists. As a result of this lack of consensus, the SEA must examine the policy options available before taking action. First, SEA's must recognize that the public, state legislatures, courts, and educational researchers have legitimate interests in the way educational quality is defined. Second, SEA's must realize that since no conclusive definition is possible, a series of operating definitions that can serve as bases for action must be accepted. These operating definitions may be focused on outcomes, processes, research results, or combinations of these. Once definitions are selected. SEA's have options when selecting the level of specificity with which the quality goals will be stated, the level of support that can be given local districts in the attempt to achieve the goals, the level of involvement of the SEA in monitoring goal achievement, and the form in which achievements can be reported to the public. (Author/PGD)

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DEFINING QUALITY EDUCATION

An Analysis of State Educational Policy Options

Prepared for Chief State School Officers of
the Northwest and Pacific

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary..... ii

Foreward.....iii

I. The Quality Emphasis and the SEA..... 1

II. SEA Policy Options in Arriving at Definition of Educational Quality..... 4

III. State Policy Options in Promotion of Educational Quality..... 14

IV. Conclusion..... 18

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Quality in education, always the deepest concern of thoughtful citizens and conscientious educators, has recently beame more popular--and hence more political. In a time when quantitative measures are losing their appeal, when the "quality of life" has became an ultimate benchmark against which everything else is measured, when the general public expresses increasing doubt about the efficacy of education, and decreasing willingness to be taxed to support it, "improving the quality of education" has marshalled a host of supporters.

Quality defined in terms of measurable outcomes--most commonly, results of competency tests of one sort or another--has strong public appeal and hence strong legislative support. Although there may be scant agreement among those most concerned with improving the quality of education regarding what constitutes "quality"--courts, legislatures, state and local educational agencies, lay and professional groups have divergent views—everyone agrees that somebody ought to do something about the problem.

That "somebody" is, for a number of valid reasons, the state education agencies. Legal bases, professional and technical ability, and agency commitment all support the contention that the SEA must take a primary leadership position in improving educational quality.

Despite the lack of agreement on the definition of quality in education, and notwithstanding the limitations inherent within or placed upon the SEA, there are numerous policy options available to the SEA in securing at least operating consensus on definitions, fostering and promoting quality programs, and monitoring and reporting results--a number of which are set forth in this paper.

FOREWORD

Purpose and Rationale

Chief State School Officers are directly involved in educational policy making, both as formulators of policy proposals for state board of education consideration and adoption, and as executive level decision makers. In both capacities, they have use for timely and accurate information about (a) the policy issues involved in a given educational problem and (b) the policy alternatives reasonably open to them. Clarification of issues and display of available options--not policy answers--therefore, is the fundamental purpose of this document.

As used here, "policy" means essentially direction--the way we intend to go. Policy, thus, is distinguished on the one hand from broad--and in other contexts, very valuable--statements of belief (e.g., "We believe every child is entitled to a full and accessible educational opportunity") and on the other from strictly procedural statements (e.g., "Every handicapped child will be provided with an Individualized Educational Plan").

A policy statement on the same subject, as distinguished from the broad, general statement of belief or the more specific statement of operational procedure, might look something like this: "In the event that resources are diminished as the result of the passage of Proposition 13, special education programs will be exempted from any reduction in funding."

This document, then, in addressing policy issues and policy alternatives, seeks not to direct, but to provide a better sense of direction which may be taken, and to illuminate insofar as possible the foreseeable consequences of the choices made by the educational decision makers involved.

Target Audiences

Chief State School Officers, the primary target audience, share their decision making responsibility with others and use the professional expertise or the lay viewpoint of others both to establish policy and to implement it. While the Chief State School Officers are the primary audience for this document, this shared responsibility broadens the potential audiences beyond just the Chiefs. State boards of education, state education agency staff, and planners and decision makers in the executive and legislative branches of government may find these analyses useful as Chiefs initiate the exploration of policy alternatives with these various groups.

I. THE QUALITY EMPHASIS AND THE SEA

Quality is making a comeback in our contemporary society. After several decades of being enamored of growth and expansion, we find that quantitative measures of anything are losing much of their appeal. Less, we have concluded, may be preferable to more; bigger is not necessarily better; no growth, rather than unlimited expansion, may become the ideal.

Though these newer concepts, which support the perhaps overworked phrase "quality of life," have been applied largely in the areas of population growth, economic expansion, and the extent and scope of governmental activity (or governmental interference, as some see it), the same lessening of concern with quantity and strengthening of the concern with quality have had marked effect on how people look at education.

Where once communities took great pride--to the immense gratification of their local educators—in building new schools for burgeoning enrollments, in expanding the school offerings and increasing the teaching staff, and generally supporting educational expenditures and even boasting about how much the community was willing to boost the budget to promote education, the spirit of educational expansionism has pretty well died out. Now, quantitative measures of educational effectiveness are no longer so appealing or so convincing. The key word now is "quality."

The strong demand for quality of education as part of the concern for enhancing the "quality of life" is given impetus by the equally strong suspicion that present educational quality is not only deficient, but dismally so. The litany of charges against education, especially public education, is depressingly familiar: students who can't read, write or compute; high school graduates with no certifiable (or even discernible)

competencies; lack of student respect for any authority, for the responsibilities of democratic living, or even for the common civilities of dress, language and public behavior. On top of that, the critics charge, teachers don't care, and the taxpayer is fed up.

Most of these charges are probably--and some patently--exaggerated, but they represent feelings that are seemingly widespread and certainly loudly proclaimed. True or not, these criticisms are coupled with a demand, often a strident demand, that someone do something about it; improve the quality of education!

And that "somebody" very often turns out to be, realistically, the state education agency, either by default or by conscious choice. The state legislature, though a very powerful source of educational support and control, can only indirectly improve the quality of education; it can't directly, and with effect, legislate quality. The courts have indicated in countless instances that although they will take a strong stand and even exert irresistible authority in questions pertaining to equality in education, they generally draw back from attempting even to define quality, much less attempting to enforce it by judicial fiat. The federal government is not generally looked upon with favor as the appropriate level of government to take over the job of improving the quality of the nation's schools--the very real spectre of federal control limits the federal role. To expect local districts acting of their own volition to assure that both the process and the product of their own schools evidences an acceptable level of quality is viewed by many persons as an unrealistic goal. Fairly or unfairly--perhaps more often the latter--local districts are believed to be too easily satisfied (out of either pride or fear or both) with the status quo to do anything drastic about improving quality.

For educational quality is an elusive and paradoxical goal. Reasonable and thoughtful people of the greatest goodwill find themselves at serious odds with one another over what is meant by "quality." To one person, a quality education would be one that was essentially, or exactly, like the one he received when he was himself in school--I want my kids taught just the way I was taught. To another, a quality education would be one which somehow, even magically, allowed each student to develop to the maximum of his own potential, without reference to past or present standards.

One of the basic paradoxes in attempting to arrive at a commonly accepted view of educational quality is seen in the sharp differences of opinion that prevail among those who have a seemingly common agreement that competency standards should be set and enforced for grade-to-grade promotion and/or for high school graduation. Holding to a common view that competency requirements and competency tests are necessary, different persons or groups diverge sharply when it comes to the meaning and the enforcement of the competency requirements. A wide spectrum of beliefs emerges even among those marching under the common banner of assured and enforced competency: mandatory testing at the state (or should it be local?) level; established standards the same for everyone (or should they be individualized and different, according to each student's needs?); competency demonstrated solely by paper-and-pencil tests (or should it be demonstrated through competencies in life-skills situations?)--this is but a very partial list of the differences of opinion among those who all believe that quality education can best be assured by requiring of the student "demonstrated competencies."

Therefore, the SEA is faced not so much with the task of devising and obtaining acceptance of a single definition of quality education--if indeed one exists--as it is with examining the policy options available to the agency as it fulfills its leadership position. These options of definition and of subsequent appropriate action are outlined in the sections which follow.

II. SEA POLICY OPTIONS IN ARRIVING AT DEFINITIONS OF EDUCATIONAL QUALITY

A. The Limited Partner Concept

Definition of educational quality by the SEA unilaterally is of course possible, but any reasonably acceptable definition with enough support to lead to effective statewide action necessarily will involve others outside of the agency. Despite the level of authority over education which may be given to the SEA by state constitution or state statute, the SEA is always somewhat of a limited partner in the conglomerate of groups who have a high level of interest in and often a high level of control over the educational enterprise.

Role of the public. It has become something of a platitude--sententious and tiresome, but nevertheless true--to assert that the schools belong to the people. After all, it's their money--and their children! The problem is not in accepting this truism, but in figuring out what it means when it comes to defining quality education.

The problem here for the SEA falls essentially into two parts. First, there is obviously no such thing as "the public," but rather a host of publics--divergent special concern (to avoid the term "special interest"!) groups who are sure that they speak for the public in general. Anyone who has dealt with groups and individuals seeking to

influence education from their own sincerely held convictions is familiar with the contradictory views: more phonics, or less; more vocational courses or contemptuous dismissal of voc ed as "trade school stuff"; more money for and attention to the educationally handicapped or, alternatively, the gifted; more--or less--consolidation of districts; more--or less or non or NEVER!--sex education. These are but a fractional sample of the divergent views which all represent "public" opinions about education and, by implication at least, what constitutes "quality" in education.

The second problem for the SEA is that the public--or at least the most numerous or most vocal sector of the public that claims to speak for "the people"--often deserves a higher quality of education than it is asking for. Public views can be farsighted and generous, or they can be narrow, self-seeking, and stultifying.

Once the SEA, however, has accepted that one of the necessary limitations of its role is that of a limited partner in defining educational quality, the problems of seeking, understanding and actively profiting from even mixed public input are not insurmountable, as the policy options in Section III, below, will make clear.

Role of the legislative bodies. Perhaps the most currently active of the multiplicity of actors on the educational quality scene today are the legislators and congressmen who have taken an interest in education--an interest that is somewhere between one of paternal concern and one of proprietary ownership. Legislatures in some three-fourths of the states have enacted laws which support or require some kind of competency testing program, always in the name of--and with the hope of--"improving the quality of education." This legislative activity is quite in keeping

with the legitimate purpose of state legislative bodies--which is surely to legislate as they see fit in the public interest as they interpret it. This activity is also clearly congruent with the long tradition of specific legislative prescription of teaching methods, course requirements, instructional and curricular strategies, the manadatory observance of Arbor Day, and such other matters as may arouse legislative concern. While educators may bridle at what seem to them infringements upon the professional field of education, the Board of Education of last resort in each state is, under our system of government, the state legislature. They are a very legitimate party to the debates about what constitutes quality education--and in a very practical political sense, theirs may well be the overriding voice and theirs the final enunciation of state policy.

The federal government, as one of the participating actors in the quality debate, has likewise a legitimate--if sometimes indirect or even devious--interest in contributing to the continuing debate over the definition of quality in education. The federal voice is heard largely through the language of authorization and appropriation bills, which often speak authoritatively about what is public concern and public policy. "It is the finding of the Congress. . . . . ." is a preamble which speaks with a good deal of weight: witness the Civil Rights Act, Public Law 94-142, or Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act.

Role of the courts. Theoretically, appeal to the judicial process is for the purpose of redressing a wrong in education: for example, suits brought to correct the evils of segregated schools (Brown vs. Board of Education), to allow students the freedom of expression that is constitutionally theirs (Tinker vs. Des Moines), to force schools to grant due process in cases of disciplinary action (Goss vs. Lopez), and

so on. In taking what they deem appropriate action to correct such wrong, the courts are almost invariably very careful to proclaim that they are not in the business of saying what the goals or processes of education itself should be: these are professionally determined matters, beyond the jurisdiction and, indeed, beyond the competence of the courts. But very frequently they add that in this particular case they are forced to spell out what they have determined to be a quality education--perhaps not in so many words, but by the implication of their findings and judgments. Thus, in Hansen v. Hobson, the federal court determined that certain testing and tracking systems did not provide education of appropriate quality to the petitioners; in the Lau case they instructed the San Francisco school system to provide bilingual education; and in countless cases involving handicapped children, courts clearly signalled that an appropriate public education for the handicapped had to have certain characteristics--in effect, to be of court determined quality.

Role of research. Along with the public (really, the varied publics), the legislative bodies and the courts, another actor sometimes comes upon the scene as a proposed determiner of educational quality: the researcher. It may seem anomalous that only rarely does research play a significant role in the quality debate; definitive research with demonstrable results should, theoretically, provide the most reliable base possible to answer persistent and nagging questions about what makes for quality education.

Research, like every other human endeavor, has its own inherent limitations, but perhaps its greatest limitation in providing SEAs and other educational decision makers with solid evidence to support one or

another view of what constitutes quality in education is that the research activities that the problem requires are rarely supported to the extent that longitudinal studies can be completed. For example, although many states have adopted, legislatively or by other means, stringent "competency" progams, no one really knows yet whether the successful survivors of these programs really do better in college or in jobs than those who were not the beneficiaries of these programs, or even whether possession of the certified life survival skills prescribed in some programs actually aids the graduate in surviving the rigors of "real life."

Despite these limitations of quality education research, the competent researcher is the one of the actors on the scene whose activities are most likely to be supportive of the SEA's attempt to get a good working definition of quality education. In fact, because of the research orientation and often the research capability of the agency itself, the researcher, with his results, is perhaps the staunchest ally that the SEA can expect to find.

B. Establishing Operating Definitions of Quality Education

Because any single definition of "quality education" is probably impossible--conceptually, politically, practically--most SEAs appear to be willing to settle for multiple operating definitions: ones not final, definitive, conclusive, but ones useful enough to get going. And getting going is the real problem, for without some working definition--or better yet, a series of working definitions on which programs can be built--there is no action possible.

Why not just skip the difficult and frustrating task of definition? That attempted "out" leads the educational decision maker into operating

limbo, for how quality is defined determines what is done; and what is done inevitably reveals what the real definition of qualty is. Realizing that the only way out of the difficulty is to arrange a series of definitions from which action altenatives can be derived, SEAs have used a number of approaches. The major approaches observed are given names only for the purpose of achieving some degree of clarity in the examination of options open; in actual practice, they are not neatly subject to such compartmentalization.

Outcomes-focused definitions of educational quality. Most if not all of the current "competency" programs are designed to encourage the attainment of measurable and verifiable learnings as a means to an evidence of quality in education. That is, the underlying operational definition of quality in education is that which can be measured in terms of its outcomes: test scores attained, courses satisfactorily completed, or specific competencies demonstrated.

Such tangible outcomes serve as one very satisfactory means of defining quality. Goals and objectives are stated in as concrete terms as possible; desired standards which express attainment of these goals are established and announced; and student performance is measured, recorded and rewarded (or the rewards are withheld) according to the individual student's level of achievement of these stated goals.

Defining educational quality in terms of outcomes has many practical and political advantages. Almost all of the actors who want a piece of the action can be involved: legislators, the general public and parents in particular; teachers and administrators and board members; both local and state educational authorities; and perhaps most important of all, the students themselves. If the desired level of student achievement is

clearly spelled out, and the actual levels of achievement fairly measured and clearly reported, everyone of the interested or involved participants can know with reasonable accuracy how well the schools are doing on the quality front. Students, too, will know where they stand individually, what is expected of them and how well they're achieving. Deficiencies revealed on an individual, school site, school district, or statewide level can be pinpointed and remedial action undertaken.

But there are problems, too, with the election of the option to define quality education wholly or mostly in terms of measurable outcomes. Courses can easily become fact-bound and stultifying; objectives will be limited to those which lend themselves to reportable measurement; teaching and learning processes may tend to become rote and routine; important individual differences--differences of ability level, learning styles and personal and social developmental needs--may easily be pushed into the background.

Process-focused definitions. Partly because of the potential limitations of a definition of educational quality focused largely or even entirely on outcomes, some SEAs (and local education agencies as well) prefer the option of addressing the quality issue in terms of process, rather than product. The focus on educational process is admittedly an approach which does not lend itself to as precise a set of definitions as does the outcomes-focused approach. Furthermore, involvement of the various concerned publics is harder to achieve, because it is more difficult to explain the subtleties of, say, curriculum strategies or instructional methodologies than it is to explain what is meant by a third grade norm in reading or the achievement of a specific competency like filling out a job application. And

finally, without an emphasis on measurable product, the whole idea of concern with process is likely to seem (and in some cases may well be) simply fuzzy-minded.

But the process orientation has much to recommend it, especially to SEAs. For it is these agencies which are in the best position to make a statewide impact on the improvement of the teaching-learning process. Since most state education agencies cannot really control local curriculum (and probably wouldn't want to if they could), and still fewer have any warrant (or appetite) for direct monitoring of individual classrooms, the SEAs long suit is the improvement of educational process.

By saying in effect that the SEA's definition of quality education is one that has certain definable (and improvable!) features, rather than one in which certain scores are attained on tests, the agency puts itself into the position of emphasizing in its operational definition of quality just what is emphasized in its basic concept of leadership and service to the schools.

As specific examples, the SEA which is process-focused in its definition of educational quality will place emphasis on helping local districts do such things as improving the selection of learning materials; diagnosing learning needs; making specific provision for individual differences and learning styles; improving the quality of classroom interactions; providing professional development opportunities for local district staff; providing training and experience in improving interpersonal and intercultural relations; suggesting ways of broadening the concept of curriculum to include more firsthand or hands-on experiences for students; helping local districts develop evaluation programs and devices that more accurately measure the student

achievement of school goals--the list of possibilities is almost inexhaustible.

Some SEAs which have chosen what is essentially a process-focused operational definition of educational quality would prefer--with good reason--to give it another name: "climate-focused." Responding to the vast amount of research data which indicate clearly that it is the learning climate that makes for good schools, those who choose to put emphasis on improving this climate focus more on the setting in which the effective process is carried out than on the process itself. Putting it another way, measuring the quality of education more by the educational climate than by the procedures used places relatively greater emphasis on the affective domain learnings as compared to those in the cognitive domain. The general school ambience, atmosphere and "feeling" are indicators of the quality of the education being conducted: positive self-images, understanding and acceptance of others; a great tolerance for individual differences, and even for individual aberrations; a feeling of belonging on the part of the students and of caring on the part of teachers--these are seen by the climate-oriented as measures of the quality of the educational program.

Ideal as it is, such a high quality educational climate as a measure of educational quality has two major drawbacks: it's hard to explain, and it's even harder to sell to a skeptical public. There comes always the perhaps unfair but wholly predictable question: sure, the teahers love the kids, and the kids love school--but what are they learning?

R&D focused definitions. Partly because definitions of quality education which zero in either on outcomes or on processes/climate do not seem wholly satisfactory, some SEAs are working to establish quality

measures more empirically on a research and development based program. The Georgia Department of Education, for example, in seeking to develop statewide quality standards for education, recently undertook an elaborate and thorough analysis of available research data covering studies of the major components of the instructional process. Included were such topics as instructional and administrative staff, instructional and management strategies, school climate and instructional media and facilities. Outstanding authorities were commissioned to produce papers summarizing available research findings covering each of these topics; these papers were critiqued by other authorities; and the findings were presented to citizen/expert "juries" who decided whether or not the research evidence was sufficient to serve as the basis for establishing statewide quality standards.

Such an approach is highly commendable, most SEAs would agree, because the final decisions about the educational programs which are calculated to produce a high level of educational quality can be illuminated by research findings. The limitation is that the decisions are not ultimately determined by the research and development data--these data simply make the ultimately practical (and political) decisions more informed, more open, and perhaps more palatable to a public that has been involved in the decision making process.

Combination definitions. Practically, it is tremendously difficult to take any definition of quality education, or any one set of definitions that derive from a single focus (or gestalt) and apply it consistently to the work of the state education agency. For that reason--and it is a good and valid one--definitions of quality education are usually not pure genetic strains, but hybrids.

Such combination or hybridization of the definitions does no violence either to logic or to professional integrity. Since education, both in general and for the individual learner, is so enormously complex a process, should it be any wonder that defining its quality requires many approaches--probes and thrusts, trials and errors, progress and setbacks: these are all an expected part of the problem, and expected hazards of the education trade.

Nevertheless, working from any definition or combination of definitions, the SEAs have demonstrated that they can come up with very specific policy options in promoting the achievement of educational quality, as the next section of this paper will illustrate.

III. STATE POLICY OPTIONS IN PROMOTION OF EDUCATIONAL QUALITY

State education agencies are action-oriented; in coming to grips with the problem of improving the quality of education, the intent generally is to use the definition(s) of quality education only as a starting point. Beyond that point comes the opportunity to select from a number of educational policy options, including the definition (which is itself an option), but moving also to choice of options in ways of supporting, monitoring, and reporting the results.

A. Options in Choice of Definition

In earlier sections of this paper, various kinds of possible focuses of operating definitions were examined. Whichever of the focuses or points of reference--or whatever adaptation or combination of them--is chosen, there remains the problem of the level of specificity within which that operating definition will be phrased.

Quality of education can be defined in very general terms, ones embodying fairly broad statements of what an ideal program should be. Such a definition raises the sights and maybe even the aspirations of those concerned with education, thus serving a useful stimulative purpose. But ideal programs are so far removed from the realities of actual operating programs, and so markedly at odds with what much of the public believes the schools are actually doing, that the result of phrasing the quality statements in ideal terms is likely to be negative or at best mixed reactions.

On the other hand, definitions of quality that address the practical realities that the schools face--limited or perhaps shrinking fiscal support, declining enrollments, public expectation that the school can tackle broad social problems that are beyond its scope--may be far less than ideal, but at least they propose that which is in the realm of the possible. Especially if the quality statements are phrased in terms of realistic increments toward an ultimate goal, they will be seen as both realistic and demanding: raising performance levels by a specific percentage each year; adding additional life-skill competencies year by year to those previously required; reducing class size in crowded grades or subjects by a specified number spread over a reasonable period of time; increasing on a graduated basis the number of opportunities for work-study programs.

Whether the quality definitions tend toward the ideal or toward the more practical, choice in either case can be made between emphasizing the quantitative or the programmatic. The former will, of course, put things into numbers--a specific, down-to-earth approach that the layman can

easily understand and will doubtless readily applaud. Numbers are appealing, but numbers are also tricky: they make commitments that can become booby traps.

Therefore, quality definitions--and quality goals--which are couched in terms of program improvements rather than specific numerical attainments represent a perhaps safer policy choice: specific enough to be understandable, honest, and realistic, but general and gradual enough so that promises are not made which cannot be fulfilled.

B. Options in Support Activities

Since all SEAs claim, rightly, that they are in the business of doing things with and for schools, and not to them, they are constantly looking for ways to support and foster quality education at the local level. The possible range of SEA support activities is as great (or limited) as the entire mission and program of the agency. General consultant services, special funding for experimental or innovative programs, professional development seminars and workshops, and capacity-building programs to help local districts improve their own leadership and instructional capabilities are the types of activities which most SEAs emphasize in the pursuit of quality education.

C. Options in Monitoring and Verifying Quality

The extent to which the SEA takes active part in monitoring and verifying the quality status of local school systems is a function partly of state constitution and statute and partly of accepted philosophies and traditions within the state. Other factors which influence the degree to which the SEA becomes directly involved in monitoring activities include

the size of the district (large districts in many if not most states tend generally to "go it alone"); the availability, training, and professional sophistication of both the SEA and the local staffs; and the expressed desires of the districts themselves.

Whatever the special state circumstances, however, a number of alternative state policy approaches have been devised. First, of course, is to declare the matter of monitoring educational quality a total local responsibility, with no state involvement whatsoever. As a variant of that position, the state--unless mandates or prohibitions preclude this choice--may declare the matter of assessing and monitoring educational quality a local responsibility but provide general parameters which are suggested for local use. One step further toward active state involvement comes when the parameters or guidelines are accompanied by rewards or penalties which the local district can seek or avoid. The final option is for the state education agency, if laws and regulations require or permit, simply to adopt and publish quality standards and enforce them unilaterally, by whatever methods of accreditation or testing it chooses.

Because of law and custom, the choice among this range of options is usually not a luxury which is fully afforded the SEA, but insofar as the choice is available, the probable consequences are quite clear: the more the responsibility for quality is left to local devices, the better the public acceptance will be--and the greater the likelihood that, statewide, quality will be extremely uneven.

D. Options in Reporting on the Quality of Education

SEAs are generally in much the same position with respect to reporting on the quality of education within the state as they are with respect to monitoring activities: law, regulation, or custom often forecloses or severely limits the policy options open. Therefore, no detailed list of policy options need be set forth here, because SEAs operate under such different sets of circumstances. Nevertheless, there is one observation about public reporting of educational quality which has been found to be true for all states: both strengths and weaknesses, pluses as well as minuses, should be reported, simply for credibility's sake. For credibility outranks even candor on any scale of values: there's nothing to be gained in telling the truth if nobody believes you!

IV. CONCLUSION

For the foreseeable future, it is becoming increasingly evident that quality, not quantity, will be the major emphasis in American public education. The state education agency, there is every reason to believe, will play an increasingly important role in formulating and promoting acceptable definitions of what constitutes quality in education. SEAs seem to be in general agreement that the current popular focus on defining and measuring quality in terms of demonstrated, tested competencies--outcomes--must be expanded to embrace also a focus on the quality of the educational process.

Otherwise, the pursuit of quality will be trivialized into a competition for high test scores.

Because the SEA has the legal responsibility, the stature, and the technical expertise to implement a variety of leadership and assistance programs to bring about a combination of emphases on both outcomes and processes, the agency's policy options for improving the quality of education, though restricted by legal, legislative, and popular decisions over which it has limited control, remain surprisingly and gratifyingly open to agency decision.